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INFO RHMFISS/18WG CP KADENA AB JA
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RHEFDHP/DIA DHP-1 WASHINGTON DC
RUYLBAH/DODSPECREP OKINAWA JA
RUESOK/FBIS OKINAWA JA
RUEHFK/AMCONSUL FUKUOKA 0200
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RUEHNH/AMCONSUL NAHA 0680
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC
RHMFISS/NAVCRIMINVSERVRA OKINAWA JA
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHINGTON DC
RUHBANB/OKINAWA AREA FLD OFC US FORCES JAPAN CAMP BUTLER JA
RUEHOK/AMCONSUL OSAKA KOBE 0274
RUEHKSO/AMCONSUL SAPPORO 0236
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 0064
RUEHIN/AIT TAIPEI 0012
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 0629
RUALBCC/YOKOTA AB HQ USFJ

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 NAHA 000227

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/16/2031

TAGS: [JA](#) [PREL](#) [MARR](#)

SUBJECT: SURVEY OF PAST OKINAWAN POLLS SHOWS INCREASING ACCEPTANCE
OF US BASES

CLASSIFIED BY: Carmela A. Conroy, Deputy Consul General,
American Consulate General Naha, DOS.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. In the upcoming November 19 gubernatorial election, the reformist camp, led by candidate Keiko ITOKAZU, has made opposing the relocation of Marine Corp Air Station (MCAS) Futenma within Okinawa and pushing for withdrawal of US bases from the prefecture its primary focus for the election. However, a survey of past Okinawan public opinion polls conducted from 1972 to 2006 by the Japanese Cabinet Office, Ryukyu University, Ryukyu Shimpou, Okinawa Times, the Asahi Shimbun, and NHK reveals a Okinawan public increasingly accepting of US bases in the prefecture. The polls also show a growing level of comfort with Japanese Self-Defense Force (JSDF) bases in Okinawa and improvement in Okinawa-mainland Japan relations. Still, differences between Okinawans and mainland Japanese remain, and many Okinawans still perceive themselves as being non-Japanese. A small few even advocate Okinawan independence from mainland Japan. But the past polls suggest that no matter who may become the next governor of Okinawa, the Okinawan public may be more receptive to messages explaining the strategic importance of the

US-Japan Security Treaty and US bases in Okinawa than the Okinawan media and politicians suggest. We will be reporting septel on the upcoming election prospects, and expect to see more recent polling in that regard. In the meantime, to help put the upcoming election in context; following is a review of past polling trends. End Summary.

Perceptions of the US-Japan Security Treaty and US Bases in Okinawa

¶2. (U) Polls show that while US bases in Okinawa remain a top issue for Okinawans, the issue's prominence does not mean that most Okinawans are anti-US-Japan Security Treaty or even anti-US bases. When the Asahi Shimbun asked Okinawans in 1997 what they thought of when they heard the word "Okinawa," 44 percentage said "bases." However, in the same poll most respondents, 57 percent, said they supported the US-Japan Security Treaty and 37 percent saw the US military presence in Japan as necessary for regional stability. In fact, polling suggests that a third of the Okinawan public may be strongly conservative. In a 2006 Ryukyu Shimpō poll, 31 percent of respondents said that US military transformation would be a plus for Okinawa, and over a quarter supported the USG-GOJ plan to build the V-shaped Marine Corp Air Station (MCAS) Futenma replacement facility (FRF) at Camp Schwab.

¶3. (U) While the Japanese Communist Party (JCP) and the Socialist Democratic Party (SDP) call for the immediate closure of all US bases, polls indicate that the majority of Okinawans do not want them immediately closed, and increasingly accept the presence of US bases. According to NHK polling, those calling for the immediate closure of US bases fell to 20 percent in 2002, the lowest level in 20 years. Also, Japanese Cabinet surveys from 1985-2001 showed the percentage of respondents who

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said US bases in Okinawa were necessary or unavoidable for Japanese security reasons increased from 34 percent in 1985 to 46 percent in 2001. The number of respondents expressing understanding exceeded those who said US bases were unnecessary or added to Japan's danger, 44 percent, for the first time in 16 years. NHK polling echoed the same trend, with support for US bases rising from 26 percent in 1972 to 47 percent in 2002. Further, Asahi Shimbun polls in 2002 and 2005 noted that over 60 percent of Okinawan respondents felt that US bases were important to Okinawa's economy. Only six percent of respondents in the 2005 poll said the bases did not help Okinawa's economy in any way.

Perceptions of the JSDF and World War II

¶4. (C) Some reformist contacts have told us that Okinawans fear the Japanese Self Defense Forces (JSDF) even more than they do the US military because of the many atrocities by the Japanese Imperial Army during World War II. However, polling indicates the opposite. Okinawan support for Japanese Self-Defense Force(JSDF) bases on island continues to be very high. According to Japanese Cabinet polling, Okinawans felt JSDF bases in Okinawa were necessary or unavoidable rose from 55 percent in 1985 to 70 percent in 2001, with almost a quarter in 2001 saying JSDF bases were necessary. NHK polling from 1975 to 2002 similarly showed those believing in the necessity of JSDF bases in Okinawa rising from 48 percent to 67 percent.

¶5. (C) A surprising trend, however, is that Okinawans' "memories" of the war seem to be growing, even as the numbers of those who actually experienced the war dwindle. NHK's 1977 poll found 64 percent of respondents said that they could not forget the war, but by 2002, 81 percent responded so. 38 percent of respondents in 1982 said that they had direct experiences with the war, but only 27 percent of respondents in 2002 had. A 2006 Ryukyu Shimpō poll echoed this point when it broke down non-support for relocating MCAS Futenma to Camp Schwab by age. According to the poll, while non-support was high among all age groups, twenty year olds and those over sixty were the highest levels of non-support, both over 70 percent.

Okinawans Perceptions of Mainland Japanese:

¶6. (U) Okinawans feel themselves distinct from mainland Japanese, which may aid those who couch US military transformation as part of an ongoing campaign by mainland Japan to discriminate against Okinawa. A 1973 NHK poll, the year following Okinawan reversion to Japanese civilian government, showed only 21 percent of Okinawans felt mainlanders understood them. That number gradually increased until 1987, peaking at 45 percent. Subsequent NHK surveys showed a downward trend, with just 35 percent in 2002 saying mainlanders understood Okinawans. Okinawans believe this misunderstanding is mutual. In NHK polls, those who said they understood mainland Japanese fell from a high of 50 percent in 1987 to 37 percent in 2002.

¶7. (U) In fact, many Okinawans do not think of themselves as primarily Japanese. Ryukyu University polls in 1996 and 2005

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showed over 40 percent of Okinawans considered themselves "Okinawan." About a third, 31 percent in 1996 and 37 percent in 2001, said they considered themselves Okinawan-Japanese, while only 12 and 21 percent, respectively, considered themselves Japanese. NHK polls showed similar results, with respondents who had a strong image of being Japanese falling from a high of 29 percent in 1987 to 18 percent in 2002. A small number of Okinawans even want to be independent from Japan. A 2005 Ryukyu University poll showed that 25 percent of respondents thought that Okinawa should declare its independence from Japan, with 20 percent thinking so even if Japan did not recognize Okinawa's independence.

¶8. (U) However, Cabinet polls show that Okinawans feel that relations with mainland Japanese have improved since reversion. In 1975, 53 percent of Okinawans were skeptical that mainland Japan and Okinawa could really become one. But by 2001, 73 percent of Okinawan respondents felt mainland Japanese understanding of Okinawans had improved since reversion. Also in 1994, 83 percent of Okinawans were positive about reverting to Japan, up from 69 percent in 1985.

¶9. (C) Comment: Public perceptions in Okinawa of the bases, and of relations with mainland Japan, remain complex and it is difficult to divide Okinawans simply into anti-base and pro-base camps. We expect to see updated polling on Okinawan perceptions as the upcoming gubernatorial election approaches. Our initial assessment is that the election may turn more on image than policy, which does not bode well for the conservative candidate.

End Comment.

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